

Technical Assistance Bulletin

Office of Minority Health
 Resource Center
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A Discussion Guide Can Enhance Your Presentation

Does your film teach as much as it can?

Clarify and reinforce its lessons with the help of a discussion guide.

An educational film, video, play, or other product is only the beginning of a learning

Use discussion guides for:

Films

Videotapes

Puppet shows

Plays

Skits.

experience. A lot more learning takes place during the discussion that follows. Discussion helps the audience digest and analyze a film's lessons and talk about those lessons in terms of their own experiences. A discussion guide should help the

audience relate characters and events to their own families and communities.

A discussion guide is a brief outline of information and talking points or discussion questions related to a film or other product. They help discussion leaders by:

- Highlighting major themes and messages
- Providing background information on issues dealt with, including scientific facts and data when appropriate
- Listing problem-solving or conflict resolution steps
- Suggesting discussion questions
- Suggesting related activities
- Listing resources for more information.

Whether you are making a film or other product from scratch or using one from another source, consider writing a discussion guide to accompany it. For the sake of discussion, the following guidelines refer to films; however, the guidelines can be applied to plays, puppet shows, skits, and other kinds of audiovisual products and presentations.

Provide Background Information

Discussion leaders need to know the film's major purpose, its intended audience, and why the film's themes are important for that audience. They may also need to know how it will help them with their jobs — for example, by meeting learning objectives for an alcohol, tobacco, and other drug (ATOD) curriculum or module.

Background information may include:

- Summary of the plot or content
- Major themes and messages
- Intended audiences
- Suggested settings for showing the film
- Information about the audience, such as what was learned during formative research, including the audience's knowledge and attitudes about alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs.

- Pointers on sensitive subjects that may arise, such as parental abuse of alcohol or other drugs.
- Information about the broader program or curriculum, if the film is part of one, to explain how the film will meet learning objectives.

Use Open-Ended Questions

Questions that call for a simple Yes or No answer do not lead to discussion. So avoid questions that begin "Do you think...?" "Can teachers help...?" "Should friends try...?" Instead, use open-ended questions, such as:

"What do you think about...?"

"Where would you go if...?"

"How can friends help...?"

"How does your neighborhood...?"

"How would you tell your brother or sister about...?"

Begin With Objective Questions

Questions about the content of the film are nonthreatening, help viewers remember themes and situations, and lead into more thought-provoking questions. For a film about drinking, for 8- to 12-year-olds, some early questions in the discussion guide could be:

"What did Tom do to show that he did not want the wine cooler?"

"What did Tom and Janet do outside of school to have fun?"

Ask for Reactions to Specific Characters and Situations

A good way to stimulate discussion is to ask participants to share their thoughts and feelings about what happens in the film. For example:

"How do you think Teresa felt while her grandmother and mother were arguing?"

"Why do you think Tony hesitated when Bob asked him to play basketball?"

"What is Carla's mother like? What things did you see her do to show her love for her children?"

Ask Questions About the Participants' Own Experiences

The next step is to ask the audience how they might feel, think, or act in similar circumstances, or how the film relates to their own community. For example:

"What kinds of problems do drugs cause in your community?"

"Who could you talk to if you had a problem like Adrienne's?"

Suggest Ways To Close the Discussion

Closing questions stimulate the audience to summarize the film's lessons and think ahead to next steps. For example:

"What are some slogans that would tell other people what this film is about?"

"What are some different ways you, as a group, could create a drug-free school/community?"

Suggest Related Activities

These may be short term or long term. If your film or video is intended primarily for school children, activities that can fit into various parts of the curriculum are most useful to teachers. Also, using related activities over several days or weeks will allow teachers to reinforce the lessons. For example:

- Have participants scan magazines and newspapers for alcohol advertisements aimed at ethnic/racial audiences.

Parts of a Discussion Guide

Here's a typical Table of Contents:

- I. Background Information
- II. Questions
- III. Related Activities
- IV. Resources

Format: Make It User Friendly

One pitfall in writing a discussion guide is the temptation to write too much. Remember that it is intended to be a practical, on-the-job tool. So keep your guide brief and easy to use.

- Highlight major themes using bold type or bullets.
- Avoid lengthy blocks of text.
- Use clear, large subheads to label each section.
- Use a type size large enough to be read easily during discussion.
- Use graphics.

- Have participants write and perform some possible commercials or public service announcements about the themes in the film.
- Have students design posters illustrating the video's message.

Give Tips for Handling the Discussion

These may include ways to introduce the film itself, so that participants know what to look for. The discussion guide could also suggest points at which the film might be stopped for some preliminary discussion. You may also want to alert discussion leaders to the sensitivity of certain subjects, such as ethnic and racial issues or parental alcoholism. For example:

"Children from families in which alcohol is abused may be used to denying the problem and may find it difficult to discuss the scene in the Jones's living room. These children may need reassurance that (1) the children in the film did not cause the disease, (2) they cannot cure it, and (3) any child can talk about such problems with a teacher or school counselor."

For some questions, it can help the discussion leader to know what sort of responses to expect (or encourage). Sample responses

Case Study

Be Smart! Don't Start!

This Federal campaign included a music video for preteens. Here is a sample page adapted from its *Music Video Discussion Guide*.

Fitting In and Belonging

Goals for Discussion

- Children will learn about positive and negative peer pressure.
- Children will be able to demonstrate three ways of saying "No."

Overview for Discussion Leader

A major reason that preteens (and adolescents) give for drinking is to "fit in"—to belong and to be accepted by a peer group. When young people begin to seek important friendships outside the home, their need to belong is increased. They are trying out new behaviors away from home and acceptance becomes extremely important. They will go to great lengths to avoid being different. If they believe that most kids are drinking, they will want to drink, too.

Discussion Suggestions

Scene in Film

- Group at the concert (appears to be self-confident, comfortable with each other, excited to see one another, not drinking, and happy).

Questions

- What is the group like?
- Why are they excited?
- What's your peer group like and what does it get excited about doing?
- How are the people in the film like people you know?
- How does it feel if you feel like you don't belong?

Suggested Activities

- Role play the refusal scene.
- Role play positive peer pressure.

should be listed briefly, and preferably in a different typeface, immediately after the questions. For example:

"What is self-esteem?

Sample responses: Standing up for yourself; not letting others push you into doing things you don't want to; making up your own mind."

Consider Arranging Questions Around Key Themes

You may want to group questions according to the different themes or messages of the film. Each set of questions, like the overall guide, can have learning objectives and background information. Begin with general, objective questions and proceed to more subjective ones. See pages 2 and 3 for examples of how this can be done.

Obtain Feedback on What You Have Written

It's a good idea to have your discussion guide pretested with its audience, along with the film. Also be sure to have it reviewed by several different people who work with the intended audience — perhaps classroom teachers or community group leaders. Help reviewers give you useful feedback by asking questions like these:

"Would the background information be clear to someone who had not yet seen the film?"

"Do you think these suggested activities will appeal to urban seventh graders?"

"Are these activities feasible for elementary school teachers?"

"Are there other resources that should be listed?"

Also consider the **National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information (NCADI)**.

This service of the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention will review both the discussion guide and accompanying materials for compliance with public health guidelines. Be sure to send your film or video along with the discussion guide when requesting a review. Write or call the National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information, P.O. Box 2345, Rockville, MD 20852, (800) 729-6686 or (301) 468-2600.

The **CSAP Communications Team** is another service of the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention. This group can provide technical assistance in developing a discussion guide. For more information, write or call the CSAP Communications Team, 7200 Wisconsin Avenue, Bethesda, MD 20814, (301) 951-3277.



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Distributed by the National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information, P.O. Box 2345, Rockville, MD 20852.

This bulletin is one in a series developed to assist programs that are working to prevent alcohol, tobacco, and other drug problems. We welcome your suggestions regarding information that may be included in future bulletins. For help in learning about your audience, developing messages and materials, and evaluating communication programs, contact the CSAP Communications Team, 7200 Wisconsin Avenue, Suite 500, Bethesda, MD 20814-4820, (301) 951-3277.